

West Virginia Writers' Project

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## Railroad

Editor Calvin W. Price's recent sound off on the radio from New York brings a letter from Mr. Robert Earle of Marion, Kansas, with reminiscences of the building of the Greenbrier railway in 1899. He was a foreman with the J. J. Strong company the first contractor who arrived in September, 1899; pitched their camp of nine army tents salvaged from the recent Spanish American war, and began operations a mile below Marlinton at the Kee Place on Stillhouse Run (now Stillwell), running into a lot of rattle snakes and copperheads the first day in the jungles.

There was a fine outfit of big Missouri mules and draft horses to operate the plows and scrapers. This being before the days of steam shovels, and the crew was mainly colored men recruited for the duration of the job in North Carolina and Virginia, who were held in a sort of benevolent subjection until such time as it pleased the management to let them settle with the quartermaster and return whence they came. Incidentally, the bosses and many of the laborers carried guns. Note - I have always heard it said that men were often shot, but they were just buried and no questions asked. Mr. Earle says that so far as he is aware he is the only one now living of strong's foremen and bosses, and he is living in retirement from construction work. All of the others seem to have met with some sort of less violent ends.

Strong was killed in a hunting accident in New Jersey;

Wels Engstrom died in a straight jacket in Cleveland; Dan Foley died in Kansas City; Bob Vanstan was last heard of in Pittsburgh in 1920; Mike Golden dropped his gun on the floor down in Oklahoma and it went off and killed him. Mike Calvin was killed in the Philippines. These men are remembered by the older inhabitants hereabouts who worked on the building of the railroad.

The editors brother, who was at that time working on the paper, is a witness to the snake killing referred to by Mr. Earle, and dissected out one of the big ones for his museum of natural history.' N. R. P.

from---Pocahontas Times, Feb. 8, 1940

by Norman R. Price

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\* West Virginia Geological Survey-Pocahontas County  
Court records

Pocahontas Times--1918

Mrs. P. F. Eades, Durbin, W. Va.

\*\* History of Pocahontas--W. T. Price

Date April 14, 1941

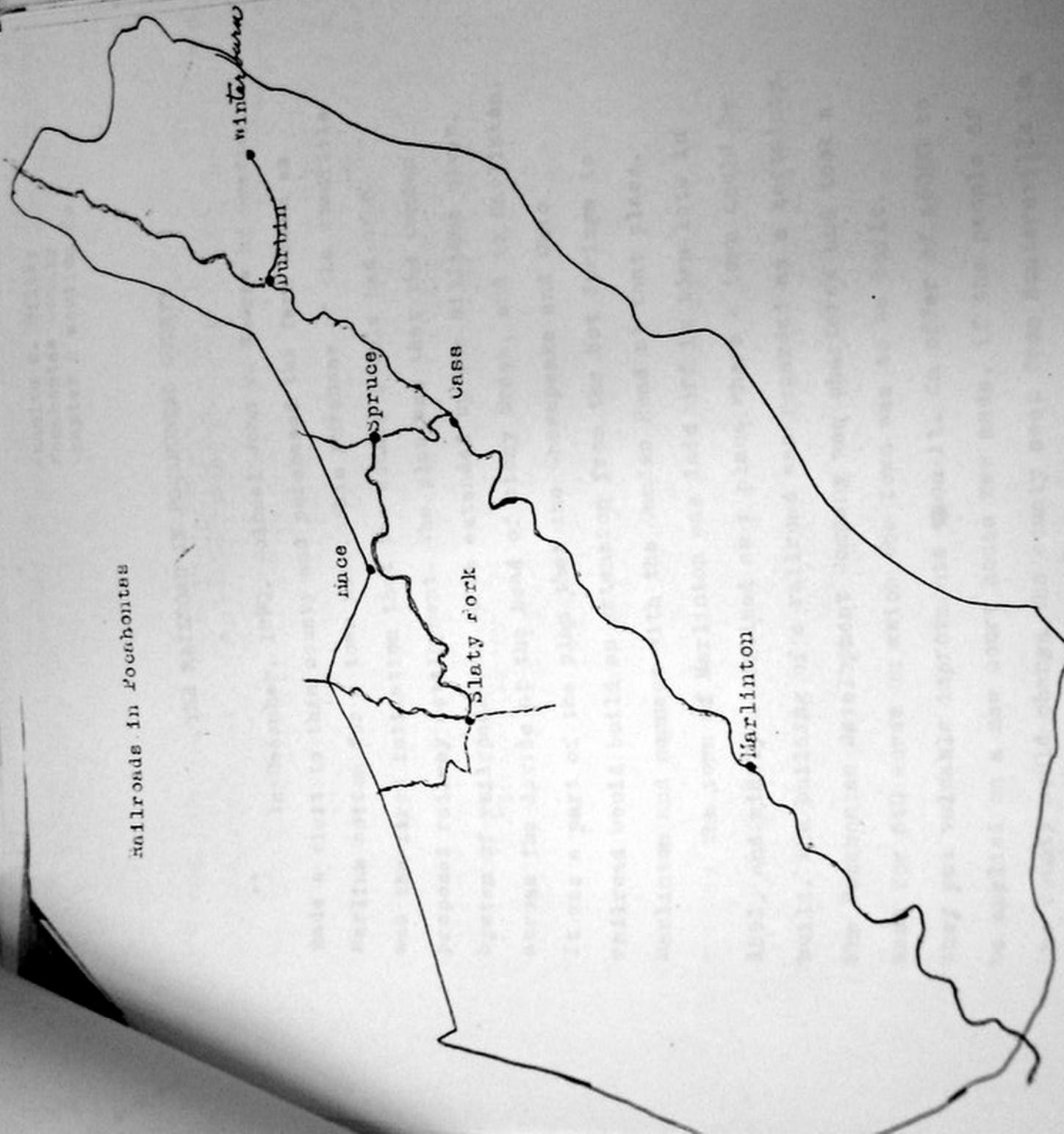
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Railroads in Pocahontas



— Chesapeake and Ohio railroad

— Western Maryland railroad

— West Virginia pulp and paper co. railroad

#### THE RAILROAD IN POOCAHONTAS COUNTY

\*\* In December, 1890, Colonel John T. McGraw of Grafton made a visit to this county and purchased the farm known as Marlins bottom for a town site. This purchase of the town site was the first intimation that the county people had of a proposed railway development. The plan was that the Camden System of railroads was to be extended up the Williams River, across the divide at the head of Stony Creek, and to Marlinton. It was a part of the plan that the Chesapeake and Ohio railroad would build an extension from the Hot Springs to Marlinton and connect with the Camden Road at that place. The town of Marlinton was laid off in town lots in 1891, and widely advertised as a place where a town could be built. The building of a railroad was regarded as a certainty. The Poocahontas Development Company was chartered and took a deed for 640 acres on which the town was to be built. They put valuable improvements on it. An offer of \$5000 to be applied on a new court house was made, if the people of the county would change the county seat from Huntersville to Marlinton. The election held in the fall of 1891 gave the county seat to Marlinton, which at that time had a population of one hundred people.

The railroad was not built at that time because of a money panic which came to the county. Colonel McGraw who had invested largely in lands at Durbin and elsewhere in the county never ceased to try to interest capitalists in this county and to try to develop it with a railroad.

his attention was called to the natural grade for a railroad up Greenbrier river, so he had a survey made from Koncevert to Marlinton at a cost of \$10,000. and it was on this location that the railroad was afterwards built.

the Greenbrier Division of the Chesapeake and Ohio railway was begun in 1899. It is a branch of the main line at Whitcomb, Greenbrier County, and extends northward across this county into Pocahontas county, following the Greenbrier river to its northern termination at Winterburn Station (Rhornwood P. O. ) At Durbin it connects with the Western Maryland railway.

It was completed to Marlinton in 1900. The arrival of the first train to that place in that same year was made a public ceremony. Some thousands gathered here and barbecued beef and had a celebration. That night when they returned to Koncevert, they told that when the train got to Marlinton that the great crowd gathered around the locomotive and the <sup>then</sup> ~~the~~ engineer requested them to give him room to turn around they cleared a space of some acres. This of course was only a localized anecdote.

\* " The track was completed to Cass in 1901, to Durbin in 1902, and to Winterburn in 1905. The completion of this railroad marked a new era in the prosperity of Pocahontas County, and has continued to be one of the most valuable assets in the county.

In reply to an inquiry regarding its construction, first operation, and track mileage, the late G. E. Wall, Vice-President, supplied the following summary:

"The construction of the branch began in June, 1899, and was completed in June, 1906. The date of the first operation of trains over the Greenbrier Branch in Pocahontas county "was in 1900. The mileage of this branch in Pocahontas county, W. Va., is, main line, 65.5 miles, with 12.75 miles of sidings."

In 1905 from a report by the secretary of state

on the assessed valuation of railroad property in west Virginia the Greenbrier Branch of the C. and O. Railroad in Pocahontas county was given as follows: Pocahontas county- 62.95 miles main line at a value of \$3,630. per mile, making a total value of main line of \$228,508.50. Length of siding-- 9.37 miles at a value of \$1,650. per mile. Total of sidings \$15,460.50. Total value of tools and machinery, \$440.00 value of buildings and real estate \$4,620.00 Telegraph line-- 64 miles at a total value of \$2,240.00 Grand total of all taxable property-- \$320,514.00

In five years, 1900 to 1905, Pocahontas county changed from being one of the few counties in the state without a railroad to the county having the greatest railroad mileage in the state. The county began to develop at once. From 1900 to 1910 Pocahontas had an increase in population of 727 which was largely due to the construction of the railroad. Number towns sprang up all along the route and boarding days for the county began. Marlinton changed from a town of 171 people to one with 1,045 by 1910 and to 1,117 in 1920. The Greenbrier Tannery of the Union Tanning Company of New York was built at Marlinton in 1901, and employed around 150 men. The Pocahontas Tannery at Frank was built soon after the completion of the railroad to that place. The farmers now had a way to get their cattle, sheep, poultry and other farm products to market without driving the overland to another state. It was no longer necessary to go to Millboro and other railroad centers out of the county and haul in goods by wagon train. Since there were four passenger trains per day up and down the Greenbrier River much of the travel to and from Marlinton the county seat and other points on the railroad was by train until the coming of the automobile and good roads made it more convenient to travel by automobile.

At the present there is the one passenger, <sup>train</sup> up from Noncovert in the forenoon and back down in the afternoon. It has a gasoline engine instead of steam. The freight goes up one day and back down the next.

The stations and postoffices are as follows:

Entering Pocahontas on Droup Mountain 34.8 miles from Noncovert, the first stop is Beard----- 41.3 miles from Noncovert  
Seebert----- 48.6 " "

Watoga-----	50.9	miles from noncert
Suckeye-----	55.0	" " "
Marlinton-----	58.9	" " "
Clover Lick-----	75.9	" " "
Sitlington-----	79.7	" " "
Cass-----	83.5	" " "
Hosterman-----	90.9	" " "
Boyer (Nottingham 2.0.)		
Durbin-----	98.4	" " "
Bartow-----	100.9	" " "

Winterburn(Thornwood P. O.) 105.7 miles from noncert

Other post offices in the county but situated on star or rural free delivery routes are:

Boyer,	burr,	Edray,	frost,
Greenbank,	Hillsboro,	Jacob,	Hunterville,
Linwood,	Lobelia,	Lace,	Mill Point,
Onoto,	Slaty Fork,	Spice,	Minnehaha Springs,
			Woodrow.

### Railroads

western Maryland railroad--spruce branch  
this branch of the railroad was built by the Greenbrier,  
Cheat and Elk railroad company in 1911. Their certificate of  
incorporation as found in Deed Book 46 page 288 is as follows.  
" September 27, 1910. The railroad which this corporation  
proposes to build will commence at or near Demis in Randolph ~~Co.~~  
County on the Shavers Fork of Cheat River thence by the most  
practicable route by way of the Valley of Shavers Fork of Cheat  
River into Pocahontas County to the waters of Big Spring branch  
of Elk River and by way of the valley of Elk to some point near  
Webster Springs in Webster County; with a branch up the Old Field  
Fork of Elk River to some point on the Marlinton and Wenden  
Railroad in Pocahontas; with a branch line from that point at  
or near the mouth of Slaty Fork and up Slaty Fork Creek to a  
point on the C and O Railroad at Clover Lick; and with a branch  
line from some point at or near the mouth of Valley Fork of  
Elk River in Randolph County. The principal business office to  
be at Cass.

The capital stock was \$50,000 divided into shares of \$100.  
each. The shareholders were:

G. M. Blaymaker-----	New York City-----	10 shares
Henry L. Condit-----	" -----	10 shares
John W. Lake-----	New York City-----	10 shares
George A. Zeffine-----	New York City-----	10 shares
W. T. G. A. McElroy-----	New York City-----	10 shares

WESTERN MARYLAND RAILROAD in POCOHONTAS

Durbin Branch

\* " The Durbin branch of the "eastern Maryland railway extends from Elkins in Randolph County, to Durbin and there connects with the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad-Greenbrier Division. According to J. W. Broome, Superintendent, this branch was completed by the Coal and Iron Railway Company on August 1, 1903, and was purchased by the present owners on November 1, 1905. In Pocahontas County there are 17.62 miles of main track with 2.01 miles of sidings."

Spruce Branch

\* " During 1928 the Western Maryland railway company purchased that portion of the Greenbrier, Cheat and Elk railroad beginning at Cheat Junction in Randolph County, and extending south along Shavers Fork to Spruce, where it turns west, crossing through the mountain passes between the headwaters of Tygart, Cheat and Elk Rivers, and then down Big Spring Fork of Elk River to the village of Slaty Fork. From this point it extends northwestward down main Elk River, and passes into Randolph County at the mouth of Dougles Fork. This railroad is entirely of standard gauge, the principal function of which in previous years was a log carrier for the West Virginia Lumber and Paper Company. This railroad will provide a general freight and passenger service in this territory, which also includes extensive coal deposits of Eastern Webster, Southern Randolph and northwestern Pocahontas counties."

When the Coal and Iron railroad reached what is now West Durbin and the Chesapeake and Ohio what is now Durbin, both had their surveys through what is called the Narrows just above Durbin. Both roads were anxious to lay steel through the gap, but the C. and O. rushed a crew in one Saturday night in October 1902. Sunday saw intense activities and when evening came a flat car loaded with ties stood at the end of the steel. That is where the switch is located going into the Pocahontas Tanning Company siding at Frank, so the C and O got ahead of the Coal and Iron. They later extended their line to Winterburn. Both companies had been anxious to build into this section so as to open up the vast timber sections.

The Durbin branch of the Western Maryland railroad of 17.62 miles extending from Durbin to the divide into Randolph County extended through one of the richest timber sections of the county. Lumber companies came into this section as soon as the railroad was completed and the lumber towns of Wildell, Gertrude, May, Bruscher, Madeline, Olive and Burner sprang up and flourished for about fifteen years. The land rose in value until it was worth something like \$5,000,000 for the timber alone, and now that the timber has been cut it is held at something like \$5.00 an acre for grazing. The Coal and Iron, what was once a vision of wealth and prosperity that name once conjured. But now the land has been stripped of its timber and the region now looks stern and wild and naked. At least seven post offices were allowed to close? ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> all of the churches were discontinued, and only one school, the Wildell school, was retained. Most of the land is now a part of the Monongahela National Forest.

West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company  
Lumber Railroad--Pocahontas County

\*\* "Certain portions of what was formerly the Greenbrier, Cheat and Elk Railroad was not included in the western Maryland purchase and are now operated by the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company. This includes a branch from Slaty Fork extending around the eastern side of Gauley Mountain and entering Randolph County near the northern prong of Big Run, and another branch from Spruce southeastward across Back Allegheny Mountain, through a mountain pass 3,940 feet above sea level, down Leatherback Run, to Cass where it connects with the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway. According to Charles W. Luke, Manager of the Company operations at Cass, the branch extending from Slaty Fork to Randolph County on Gauley Mountain will be taken up after the timber has been removed from that area, but the branch connecting the Chesapeake and Ohio at Cass with the western Maryland at Spruce will in the future be operated by the Lumber Company as a private railroad."

\* From West Va. Geological Survey--P. Price  
1929